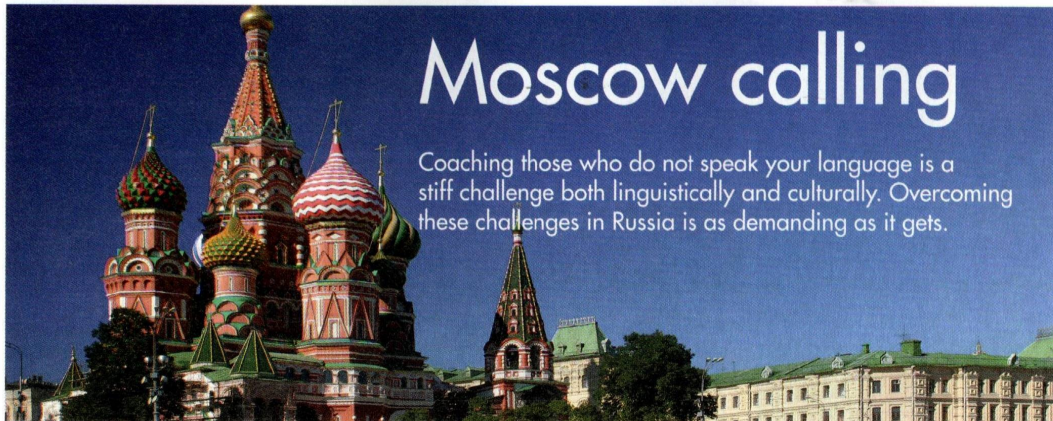


coaching at work 



The process of coaching is always seen as a rather intimate affair, where two people meet by mutual consent and talk through, with honesty, difficult situations.

Imagine then trying to kick-start a coaching culture in front of a vast bank of Russian engineers and translators, while wearing the style of microphone headset and earpieces normally seen at a pop concert.

"At the start I did feel like Madonna," says coaching expert Jane Meyler. "And on a personal basis it was exhausting, but within a short while I was having conversations at a deep level."

Meyler, inaugural faculty member at the School of Coaching, travelled to Moscow in May 2007 at the invitation of Russian telecoms giant Beeline. The project involved running a three-month programme for 18 people from the company's top and middle management levels involving coaching skills, training and individual coaching sessions. The chosen 18, who each led teams of at least 50 staff, would then cascade their learning throughout the organisation.

Retention is key

"The aim of the programme was the retention of high-performing teams," she says. "This is essential in a fast-moving and competitive marketplace such as mobile phones, where Beeline operates."

"In such a vast country, there is also the geographical challenge of managing people who you don't see very often, and who are set high targets, which means that the verbal contract becomes so crucial," says Meyler.

Meyler, who worked in Moscow with the school's director of corporate programmes Chris Sheepshanks, delivered a programme that included: an introduction to the key coaching models; the



Jane Meyler,
School of
Coaching

development of core coaching skills; understanding how coaching fits into the workplace; using coaching as a tool to get the best out of others; understanding your impact as a leader; and developing a personal plan for implementing what would be learned on the course.

Course content was the result of pre-planning work and mutual visits, which had been ongoing since December 2006. "The work started before we set our feet on Russian turf," says Meyler, who points out that objectives, style and models were agreed before the programme started. "And we had materials interpreted in advance," she says.

In total, Meyler and Sheepshanks spent nine days (in three sets of three) in Moscow over the three-month period.

She found a lot of enthusiasm. Delegates had applied for places via the Beeline University and so had already demonstrated commitment. But they had little awareness about coaching as a concept.

Delegates were more familiar with didactic approaches – or showing and telling – methods of training and development, which are embedded in Russian management culture. "There was a lot of knowledge and capability, but the quality of listening was not sophisticated. This

presented us with an enormous challenge because they wanted to constantly tell and give opinions, but we wanted them to listen and ask questions," she says.

Listening skills

Meyler and her client had already established that listening skills were an important part of successful coaching and that they are major plank in any strategy for retaining good staff.

But Meyler found that the Russian way of acknowledging training and development courses is based on formality and paperwork. "One of the key issues for Russians is the accreditation and certification of any course. Every day, after we finished, the programme forms were signed."

Beeline is still evaluating the benefits of coaching on its business, but Meyler and Sheepshanks were able to see its impact straight away. Many of the programme's participants were keen to open up their hearts and minds.

"And thanks to the authenticity of the experiences, we were able to get the programme to work very quickly in the room," says Meyler. "We generated a place where good conversations happened."

by Stephanie Sparrow

TOP TIPS FOR EXPORTING UK SKILL TO RUSSIA

Generally speaking, anyone who gets involved in running training or coaching courses in Russia should be aware of the following:

- Most Russians are not familiar with western European management techniques but are very keen to learn.
- Prepare in advance—translate materials and build relationships with key people before the course starts.
- Although seemingly reserved, Russians are

emotional about how they relate to other people. They are prone to quoting poetry and using metaphors.

- There is a hunger for creative ideas and the entrepreneurial spirit.
- Lunchtimes are sacrosanct.
- Certification is popular and expected.
- Don't think in terms of national stereotypes— you will find that you have forgotten them anyway as the course progresses.